

*Right-Hemisphere
Conducting, Nr. 3*

Music is not an Art Object

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A number of early philosophers debated what is meant by "Art." Do we mean by Art what the artist has in his mind, or is it the actual manual activity of the artist or do we mean by Art the finished art object? The early Church fathers rejected all three, saying, No, the credit must go to God for he made the artist.

The question is even more complicated, yet more interesting, when the subject is Music. The ancient Greeks separated Music from the other arts, primarily because Music alone among them cannot be seen. This caused them to classify painting as a craft, but Music as something divine.

Certainly Music is something different from a Painting. A Painting is a past tense completed object hanging on a wall, whereas Music only exists in live performance in the present tense. For this reason, a Painting is a noun, but Music is a verb. A Painting can be owned by an individual, but no one owns Mozart. It is for these reasons alone that Music must be treated separately from Painting and Sculpture. Dance is even more problematic because it depends fundamentally on Music. In fact, some ancient Greeks referred to Dance as the sixth part of Music, the part you could see.

But for the world of the conductor there is another distinction, having to do with the means and the end. Michelangelo, it is clear from the comments of his contemporaries, considered Art to be in the artist's head and that the finished art work was a representation of this. In between these two lay months of laborious work which was necessary but of little importance in comparison with the other two.¹ And we as observers of Art are not particularly interested in the means, only the end.

In Music the "means" is the rehearsal process. In earlier times because they had more power, conductors took advantage of the "means," often requiring great amounts of rehearsal time. The first performance of the Stravinsky, *Rites of Spring*, required 120 rehearsals; today an orchestra requires perhaps three hours. I recall a rehearsal in college when the conductor spent two hours on the first five bars of a march!

There is something fundamentally wrong with the philosophy of such conductors. First of all, they were, in my experience as a player in such rehearsals, devoting themselves to the rehearsal of the details they saw on paper. But there is no music on the paper, only the grammar of music. Even worse, they regarded the rehearsal time as a time for work and only the concert as a time for making music.

That is how I learned to conduct from my university experience. In my first semester of my first job, at the University of Montana, I held one rehearsal per week for the concert band, to allow all of us some relief from the kinds of music used on the football field. One of these

¹"It is necessary to keep one's compass in one's eyes and not in the hand, for the hands execute but the eye judges." Quoted in Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori* (Florence, 1878), VII, 270.

rehearsals was visited by a distinguished music education professor at the university, Lloyd Oakland. After rehearsal he said to me, in the most gentle voice, casually holding his pipe, "It seems to me that you don't enjoy rehearsing." "No sir, for me rehearsal is a time for hard work in order that the concert will be musical." "Oh, well," he recalled from his own days as a conductor, "I always enjoyed rehearsals for they too are music making." That comment changed my life as a conductor and my next rehearsal was quite different.

If the reader will forgive me I should like to offer another personal illustration regarding the purpose of rehearsals, the "means to the end." In the year I studied with Eugene Ormandy, I was present for the first rehearsal of the season, a Bruckner Symphony. With nothing more than a brief welcome to new members, Ormandy began with the first movement and there was no break for more than twenty minutes. I, being still in my twenties and very inexperienced, was sitting there wondering when he would begin to rehearse. I was eager to observe his rehearsal technique. When the orchestra stopped, the assistant conductor sitting with me in the hall leaned over to me and said, "Oh!, it sure ruins a good rehearsal to have to stop."

So how should one rehearse? First, one must realize that the students in the ensemble probably already have more technique, as needed in their etudes, etc., than is required for any piece of band music. And, assuming there are no errors in the parts, they can probably quickly learn the notes in rehearsal without further comment. Second, the conductor must remember that the students are there because they love music and they love to play. Any time spent in lecturing them on the grammar of music will turn them off. What the students need, and what should be the point of the rehearsal, is the music which is not found on paper. Remember there are no symbols for the emotions on paper. The conductor knows, from his score study, what the composer was trying to communicate in terms of feeling. The purpose of the rehearsal is to bring into alignment the music heard in the room with the music heard in the conductor's head. If this is the goal, then all rehearsals, even the first one, will consist of music making.

And, as a bonus, you get to hear and have those wonderful musical experiences over and over again and not just once in the concert!